



MEDIA STATEMENT

Situational Report on Essential Food and Medication

Saturday 28 March 2020

Bula Vinaka Members of the Media

The Fijian Competition and Consumer Commission (FCCC) in its continued efforts to assist Fijians during this challenging time is conducting ground assessment to ensure availability of supply. This announcement is to provide a situational analysis.

1. Shortage of Sugar

There had been reports of shortages which were largely caused by panic buying and the Lautoka lockdown.

FCCC following the assessment and discussion with the supplier, Fiji Sugar Corporation and the Fiji Police Force would like to inform our Fijian consumers that FSC has more than 15,000 tonnes in total sugar stock that needs packaging into smaller packs such as 2kg and 4kg packs. The larger 25kg packs are available with no limits while Common-sense limits to 2kg and 4 kg packs have been put in place.

Moreover, FSC has put in place a 24 hour, 7 days a week operation of the packaging plant. FCCC has confirmed that delivery to Tavua, Ba, Rakiraki, Suva, Nausori has commenced as of early this morning while other areas will be serviced tomorrow and early next week.

2. Price Gouging Investigations

FCCC is also actively investigating businesses that have engaged in price gouging, issues of drastic price increase noted in prices of hand sanitizers, face mask, handwash, and antibacterial soap. For example, a particular supermarket has been noted to increase the price of Protex to \$4.49 while the price of Palmolive antibacterial handwash has been pushed up to \$8.95. Our ground team in Nadi has reported this particular incident.

I would like to issue a stern warning to businesses who try to profiteer when our people are afraid, FCCC will come down very hard after you.

3. Medicines

FCCC is very closely monitoring the situation with wholesalers and pharmacies to ensure adequate supply of medicines. The President of the Fiji Pharmaceutical Society, Mr. Reenal Chand has confirmed that "the pharmacies around the country are trying their level best to maintain adequate stock levels through the regular ordering of pharmaceuticals from our local suppliers. The relevant authorities are

working together to achieve the best outcome for everyone and to ensure that we do not see any major disruptions.

The Fiji Pharmaceutical Society is currently limiting quantities to avoid one patient hoarding essential medication (or medication rationing). Most pharmacies across the country are engaging in such limits to ensure that they do not run out of stock due to panic buying and that everyone has access to medication.

FCCC has also confirmed that with Ray Pharmaceutical, a major wholesaler who has reported that due to lockdown in New Zealand for 4 weeks, domestic stock purchase within New Zealand will be prioritized. Hence, most of the orders are on hold now. The same is expected if Australia goes under lockdown. Most of the essential medicines, medical and health products are imported from Australia and New Zealand.

Currently all stock that exists will last till into May, orders have been placed for Australia and New Zealand lines for early next month (April) delivery. Currently 2 shipments are coming this weekend (29/03/2020), one from New Zealand (2 tons) and Australia via New Zealand (1.6 tons). Wholesaler has indicated that “we should not panic much as I think there is enough to cater for time being”.

4. Supply Security

Suppliers have confirmed that at present there are no disruptions in supply with orders currently in route and should commence arriving into Fiji from this weekend onwards. Critical items remain adequately stocked within Suva and all towns. Based on information provided from suppliers, stock levels will be replenished in the months of April and May as there is no indication from shippers on services being disrupted.

Essential items remain adequate within Suva and all towns. However, there is a limited supply of produce items such as potato, onion and garlic given the hype in buying over the last week. However, consultation with importers have indicated that supplies will arrive into Fiji by this weekend and that there are no delays in supply. Currently, supplies have stock that will cater for the next three weeks which should be replenished given the inbound stocks arriving this weekend. Current issues are with the workforce in the Australian and New Zealand markets.

Moreover, I want to assure every Fijian family that Fiji is food-secure, and they can take comfort knowing that FCCC has confirmed with all major supermarkets that basic food is available (with the exception of sugar which has now been resolved), while Suppliers around Fiji have reported that shipments have not been cancelled and are on route to Fiji in April and May 2020. This has been confirmed by the Fiji Grocers Association in writing.

FCCC will constantly monitor the situation and have asked traders to do their best to keep all the products available to everyone. We will also update you on the supply and availability of essential food items because we know that it can be frustrating when you don't have the products you need. Be assured that we are working very closely with the importers, wholesalers and retailers to get products onto shelves as quickly as we can to meet current demand. Our team members are doing the very best they can, so please support them, and each other.

Thank you for your patience and understanding as we work through this together.